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ABSTRACT

Year-round schooling is a form of educational restructuring designed either to increase efficiency by enabling a district to accommodate more pupils without providing new buildings or to modify the school year to improve both academic and nonacademic outcomes. The main forms of year-round schooling include the single-track calendar and multi-track calendar. There are also intersession programs. A year-round calendar has little or no negative impact on either academic or nonacademic student outcomes. There is evidence that at-risk students show enhanced academic progress. Parents with no exposure to year-round schooling are usually negatively disposed toward it, whereas those with first-hand experience are positively disposed. Teachers with first-hand experience also prefer it over the traditional school year calendar. Even administrators prefer the year-round model despite increases in administrative workload. When changing from a traditional to a year-round calendar, planning should be done carefully and introduced with consultation and collaboration. When creatively implemented with attention to community needs and particular emphasis on both political and educational issues, it promises educational advantages for all students. Appendix A describes common year-round schedules. (Contains 12 references and 9 resource Web sites.) (RT)

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From Inquiry to Practice



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YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLING: Reviewing What We Know

By Carolyn M. Shields
and Steven Lynn Oberg

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By Carolyn M. Shields and
Steven Lynn Oberg

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Configurations and Models	1
Single-Track Year-Round Schooling	2
Multi-Track Year-Round Schooling	3
Intersession	3
Single-Track Secondary Schools	4
Multi-Track Secondary Schools	4
Perceptions of and Effect on Stakeholders	5
Students' Academic Performance	5
Students' Non-Academic Outcomes	6
Parents	6
Teachers' Pre-implementation Concerns	7
Teachers' Transitional Issues	8
Teachers' Post-implementation Responses	8
Administrators' Attitudes	9
Administrative Challenges	10
Summary	10
Contextual Considerations	10
Political Issues	11
School and Community Issues	11
Fiscal Issues	12
Calculation of Costs and Benefits	12
Conclusion	13
Endnotes	13
Resources	16
Books and Articles	16
Websites	16
Appendix A: Common Year-Round Schedules	17

INTRODUCTION

Year-round schooling is a form of educational restructuring designed either to increase efficiency by enabling a district to accommodate more pupils without providing new buildings or to modify the school year to improve both academic and non-academic outcomes. Proponents assert that year-round schooling encourages simultaneous reculturing and restructuring. Detractors, on the other hand, maintain that it offers neither increased efficiency nor excellence but disrupts the traditions of schooling and, in particular, impedes participation in family and community life.

Although the truth is likely somewhere in between, the literature and research indicate that year-round schooling offers both fiscal savings and improved student outcomes where it is implemented with attention to the cultural, political, and fiscal context and with clarity of purpose.

In this monograph, we define and describe some of the most common configurations and models of year-round schooling used in elementary and secondary schools throughout the United States and in Canada (see Appendix A for additional models). We then present the perspectives of four key stakeholder groups — teachers, administrators, students, and parents — regarding the effects of year-round schooling. Next, we reflect on some contextual considerations related to successful implementation and policy initiatives. In our conclusion, we present some additional considerations for equity and excellence related to year-round schooling and highlight some of the key advantages and disadvantages we have discovered based on our research and our review of the literature.

CONFIGURATIONS AND MODELS

The phrase *year-round schooling* suggests that students are in school all year long. In fact, there are many different models and configurations of year-round schooling, most of which have the same number of days as the traditional school year. What is common to all is that the long summer vacation of the traditional school calendar is reallocated more evenly throughout the year.

There are two main forms of year-round schooling, each introduced for specific reasons. A single-track calendar is usually implemented to provide a more balanced and enriched educational program or to accommodate the special scheduling needs of a unique community.¹ The multi-track calendar is usually endorsed in an attempt to keep up with rapidly increasing enrollment or when cost-cutting pressures force districts to look for ways to house a growing number of students in existing facilities. Because the organization of classes is staggered, with some students on vacation while others are in school, this calendar permits districts to accommodate more students in existing buildings.

Despite the growing number of year-round schools, the traditional calendar is still the norm throughout the United States and Canada, where more than a century of tradition makes changing the calendar difficult. Nevertheless, there were more than two million students in 2,931 year-round schools in 597 districts in the United States by 1999, according to the National Association of Year-Round Education.² While the majority were at the elementary level, almost 20% were middle or secondary schools.

Find the full text of
the national report
Prisoners of Time at
[www.ed.gov/pubs/
PrisonersOfTime](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PrisonersOfTime)

Single-Track Year-Round Schooling

Of all schools in the United States and Canada reporting some variation of a year-round calendar as of 1999, approximately 60% were on some form of single-track schedule. In general, while students on such schedules spend the same amount of time in school as their peers on traditional schedules, the school year begins earlier and ends later, and classroom and vacation times are redistributed. Often during their vacation, generally called intersession, students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of educational activities for remediation or enrichment. The appellation single-track, which applies to the whole school, is used to distinguish this schedule from the sometimes more controversial multi-track schedule that involves groups of students rotating on overlapping schedules called tracks.

Although there are a variety of reasons for adopting a single-track schedule, the focus is usually on reducing students' learning losses over the long summer vacation, providing a regular and rhythmic cycle of instruction and vacation, and making use of the intersession time to enhance student learning.³ The single-track calendar is generally thought to offer a less stressful schedule for teachers and a more balanced school year for families at little or no additional cost to the school or district.⁴

In one very common variation of single-track year-round schooling, the 45-15 model, students attend school for 45 days followed by a 15-day vacation break. The sequence is repeated four times to complete the academic year about the end of June. Classes begin in July and follow a regular pattern of school and breaks, with students and teachers participating in traditional holidays as well as regular vacations throughout the year. Teachers can participate in district-designated days for professional development activities as well as teachers' association conferences. In another common variation of the single-track calendar, some schools adopt a schedule consisting of three 60-day sessions in school with subsequent vacation periods of 20 days. Not all legislative mandates related to the length of the school day or year facilitate such equal distribution of in-class and vacation periods.

Most schools and districts have implemented one of the calendars described above. However, in a number of communities, more responsive approaches have been used. In a community-based approach, schools begin by inviting parents and other community members to provide input about a modification to the school calendar.⁵ In a logging community in northern Canada, for example, a small school faced with declining enrollment and imminent closure decided to implement a year-round calendar designed to meet the specific needs of the community. While loggers are able to work during the winter and summer months, during both the spring thaw and the fall freeze, roads into the forests are impassable. In developing an alternative calendar, school personnel considered employment downtime and scheduled three-week vacations during these periods when parents were able to spend time with their children. In another instance, a private, locally administered, aboriginal school operated a single-track calendar that began in August and scheduled vacations to coincide with traditional hunting and fishing seasons.

In some community-based options, implementation is gradual; some parents and students opt for a calendar that begins three or four weeks ahead of the traditional school year, while others maintain their traditional schedule. This modification, sometimes called dual-track or school-within-a-school, offers patrons, teachers, and students increased choice and control over their educational schedule. In some instances, the dual-track allows for gradual implementation of a modified calendar for the whole school as people become more familiar with it.

Learn how one Utah
district implemented
year-round school
at [www.wash.k12.
ut.us/policy/9000/
9850_year-round_
school.htm](http://www.wash.k12.ut.us/policy/9000/9850_year-round_school.htm)

Many community-based approaches enable students to take advantage of learning opportunities not usually available to students on a traditional school calendar. Some also provide for an earlier start to the day during the summer and a shorter lunch break, leaving additional time at the end of the day for students to enjoy the summer weather and ongoing community activities. The dual-track option also increases access to school facilities, such as computers, gym, and playground, during the time periods when only part of the school is in session.

Multi-Track Year-Round Schooling

On this schedule, students are organized in classes on tracks with staggered schedules, with some on vacation while others are in class. Typically, the students and their teachers are divided into three, four, or five groups called tracks. At any given time, students in one track will be on vacation while others are in school.

Multi-tracking is an efficient way to alleviate overcrowding and to accommodate more children in existing buildings. For instance, a school that could normally house 600 students on a traditional or single-track schedule could serve 800 students — an increase of 33% — on a four-track schedule by rotating groups of 200 students and their teachers throughout the year.

Students on a multi-track schedule spend the same amount of time in school as their peers on traditional schedules, with their school and vacation time distributed differently. While some new schools are designed to accommodate multi-track schedules, most often such schedules are implemented in existing schools that have exceeded their intended capacity. In these schools, moving to overlapping schedules can relieve overcrowding and increase student access to educational resources.⁶

Intersession

Many schools choose to offer what are commonly known as intersession programs during the breaks between regular school sessions. Such programs take various forms.⁷ Full-time teachers, such as resource or Title I teachers, may be assigned to provide programs during intersession for students most in need of academic support. In some districts that offer summer school funding, schools are able to redistribute the money and to provide special programs for students. In other districts, special grants are procured to fund intersession programs. Where no additional funds are available, schools may choose to offer intersession on a cost recovery basis, frequently at a lower cost to parents than daycare. Some schools charge an activity fee for participating students but encourage parents to accompany their children free of charge. This option may have the effect of increasing parental involvement in and support for the school as well as providing additional adult supervision for students. Still other schools invite local groups, such as parks and recreation departments or the YWCA, to offer recreational activities, sports, swimming lessons, or crafts during school breaks.

While some schools tend to offer the intersession programs as enrichment activities, others concentrate on a range of academic options from targeted remedial programs to opportunities for gifted and talented students. The use of regularly occurring breaks for remediation or enrichment is one strength of the single-track year-round school calendar. Where a multi-track schedule has been introduced to reduce overcrowding, it may appear more difficult to introduce intersession programs, but it is possible and desirable with advanced planning and creativity.

Single-Track Secondary Schools

In the secondary model, students may complete their academic credits in more compact time periods than a traditional year. Terms may be followed by intersession breaks, where students who have failed to complete a subject or have fallen behind are able to complete or retake the class. This enables them to proceed through the course sequence with their peer group. Sometimes academically capable students are able to take additional courses offered during intersession in intensive formats (four hours a day) in order to free space in their schedules for required subjects or to enhance the number of credits for graduation. Occasionally, secondary schools also offer enrichment activities during the intersession breaks, for example, band camps, hiking trips, drama, and community service.

In many instances, graduation rates have increased and dropout rates have decreased after implementing year-round schooling at the secondary level. Moreover, when schools use a schedule change to engage in creative planning, the possibilities for student support and enrichment are limited only by the creativity of those involved in the planning.*

Multi-Track Secondary Schools

Several issues make implementing multi-track schedules in secondary schools difficult, foremost of which is scheduling. In general, high schools offer numerous subjects to prepare students for college as well as employment and career opportunities. While some courses are popular, others have limited enrollment and are generally offered in single classes (sometimes called singletons) each term. In a large school, most subjects can be offered on more than one track. In a smaller school, students wanting senior college preparatory classes, such as a foreign language, calculus, or computer science, might all have to be assigned to the same track. This could necessitate scheduling of other classes, such as vocational electives, on a different track, thus restricting student options. It could also have the undesirable and inequitable effect of streaming the high school by track. Multi-track year-round schedules are not easy options for many secondary schools wanting to effect a calendar change.

There are, however, exceptions. If there is willingness to reinvest some of the cost savings accomplished by accommodating more students in a given building, it is possible to have a successful multi-track schedule in a smaller high school by creative scheduling of singleton classes. For instance, offering small classes on several tracks, at least in alternating years, is one solution. Another is to combine small classes, such as eleventh- and twelfth-grade French classes, and offer the combined class on every track. This allows all students access to the elective and avoids grouping students by subject choices. Where there is more than one high school on a multi-track schedule in a community, electives can be offered on different tracks in different schools, so that students have increased access by traveling between schools.

Multi-track year-round schooling is also appropriate for schools that operate on a middle school philosophy of keeping groups of students together to enhance the cohesiveness of their educational program and the intimacy of their contacts with teachers. Sometimes the multi-track schedule is accompanied by the division of students into "houses" or "villages," each containing smaller groups of students and a team of teachers to ensure the interaction and support characteristic of the middle school philosophy. This approach can help eliminate the problems of scheduling and overcome inequitable track assignments.

PERCEPTIONS OF AND EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS

Upon first hearing of a possible change to a year-round schedule, many people wonder about the impact of a calendar change on stakeholder groups. What about student employment? Participation in community sports activities? Family traditions? In this section, we examine the impact of year-round schooling on four key stakeholder groups: students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

Students' Academic Performance

Year-round schooling at the secondary level is often associated with an increase in the number of graduation credits attained as well as a decrease in dropout rates. At the elementary level, a positive impact on student achievement is well documented.⁹ Other literature reviews have identified studies in which there was either a slight gain or no difference between the academic achievement of students in traditional calendar schools and year-round schools.¹⁰ Sometimes a finding of no difference has been used to argue against implementing year-round schooling, but it also demonstrates that structural change, increased facility use, and cost benefits can occur without negative consequences to important student outcomes.¹¹

When standardized achievement test scores of fifth-grade students in one district were compared over a six-year period using a regression analysis to control for students' socioeconomic status, elementary school students in multi-track year-round schools outperformed their counterparts in traditional calendar schools.¹² While 21% of the test scores in schools with traditional calendars fell below the state-predicted range of achievement for each school (taking the specific school population into account), only 4% of test scores in multi-track year-round schools fell below the predicted range. The difference is significant, especially since these multi-track schools had not instituted intersession classes.

Some researchers have attempted to determine whether there is a differential effect on student achievement according to gender or race. Harris Cooper and his associates reported that even though one study they reviewed found an overall positive effect, most notably for males, they found no differences in summer learning loss between males and females.¹³ Findings from this latter study also supported an earlier study that found no differences in achievement between different racial and ethnic groups when socioeconomic status was taken into consideration.¹⁴

There is compelling evidence that the positive academic effects of year-round schooling are enhanced for at-risk students.¹⁵ One apparent exception is a 1987 study that found that overall student achievement in multi-track year-round schools in a large, urban community was lower than in other schools.¹⁶ However, the researchers themselves explain that this finding was likely due to a number of factors other than year-round schooling.

The research advances three major explanations for the consistent positive relationship between student academic performance and year-round schooling. First, changes in curricular materials and instructional practices that accompany a change in the calendar may contribute to achievement gains.¹⁷ Second, some researchers have found that the long, traditional summer vacation is particularly detrimental to the learning and retention of disadvantaged and at-risk students.¹⁸ Third, some of the gains may be due to intersession participation, which in essence results in an extended school year.

Listen in on the debate
surrounding year-
round schooling at
[www.primenet.com/
~wwalker/letters.htm](http://www.primenet.com/~wwalker/letters.htm)

Students' Non-Academic Outcomes

Year-round schooling generally facilitates student involvement in extracurricular activities.¹⁹ Personnel representing summer recreation leagues and camps in one study reported no decline in participation after year-round schooling had been implemented. Some community service groups made changes or modified their programs or delivery schedules, for example, some YWCAs began to offer swimming lessons in three-week blocks throughout the year to coincide with the breaks.

Many researchers have reported that students on year-round schedules seemed more ready to learn, maintained their motivation throughout the year, and experienced less burnout than their peers on traditional calendars.²⁰ Most students indicated that the summer vacation associated with the traditional calendar seemed long and often boring, and many reported they were eager to return to school.

There is also consensus that year-round schooling reduces the dropout rate, facilitates retention in school, and increases student attendance rates at the secondary level.²¹ Where intersession offers the opportunity for a student who has failed a class to retake it and not repeat a whole year, the benefits are perceived to be considerable.

Consistent with a 1988 study, we found that year-round schooling may increase opportunities for student employment, because not all students are looking for jobs at the same time.²² Moreover, students report that having breaks in which outside work does not interfere with either academic or extracurricular activities is positive.²³

Many year-round schools also reported a decrease in incidences of student vandalism, and communities noted a concomitant decrease in juvenile crime.²⁴ Respondents to our surveys and interviews reported similar declines.

In sum, a year-round calendar has little or no negative effect on either academic or non-academic student outcomes. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that students may benefit academically when a school changes to a year-round calendar. These benefits accrue to both at-risk students and others, to those who have the opportunity to attend intersession and to those who do not, to those who are in single-track as well as multi-track schools, and to elementary as well as secondary students.

Parents

Consultation with parent groups is generally an important part of a district's preliminary investigation into the feasibility of year-round schooling. However, it is important to recognize that there may be a disparity between the perceptions of parents with no experience of year-round schooling and those of parents with first-hand experience. For example, in a 1983 review of six studies of parents' attitudes, those with no experience of year-round schooling were usually negatively disposed towards it, while those with experience tended to favor it.²⁵ In a 1992 study of 236 households of students enrolled in the first year of a year-round schooling pilot project, only 10% of survey respondents wanted to adopt a year-round calendar permanently.²⁶ However, a 1990 review of 10 studies conducted during the 1980s found generally positive parent perceptions.²⁷

In our own work in 17 districts in the United States and Canada, more than 80% of parents favored the continuation of a year-round calendar after experiencing it for more than one year.²⁸ Parents who supported year-round schooling believed that the three-week breaks resulted in considerably less boredom during vacation time, better retention of learned material, and less stress and burnout for students. Many parents said they enjoyed having time off

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theweb.com/
interactive/discbarn/
yrroundsch.htm](http://www.mommieson
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interactive/discbarn/
yrroundsch.htm)

throughout the year to take advantage of different seasonal events.

Other benefits parents perceived were distributing childcare expenses over the whole year and having regular quality time with their children. Parents also maintained that their school building was less crowded, accommodated more students, was used more efficiently, had less wear and tear, and saved taxpayers money.

Disadvantages identified by parents of students enrolled in year-round schools included concerns that sometimes children were home alone while parents were at work and older siblings were in school and that elementary students were in school when friends, neighbors, and older siblings were on break. Some parents also wondered whether their school was adequately maintained and repaired without a long summer break.

The traditional school calendar presents advantages and disadvantages as well. On the plus side, parents noted the opportunity to enjoy summer activities and vacations as a family, particularly if their children were in junior or senior high school and already on different calendars during the school year. Primary disadvantages identified by parents included student boredom, interruption of learning, loss of learning, and the need to review material following the long summer break.

Overall, parents of children on both traditional and year-round calendars who responded to our surveys most frequently expressed the belief that their respective calendars offered the most advantages. Each was perceived to provide teachers with needed breaks and to reduce burnout. Each offered some advantages and disadvantages in terms of school facilities. Some parents indicated that not having their school open in the summer eliminated costs associated with air conditioning. At the same time, they said long summer breaks permitted thorough cleaning and repair, reducing wear and tear on a school that was often overcrowded.

Parents tended to agree that community activities are still geared toward the traditional school calendar. On the other hand, some parents of children in year-round schools reported that their communities had adapted, for example, by offering swimming lessons at the local pool while some children were on break. They also indicated that the year-round schedule permitted children to participate in seasonal activities that might not be offered in the summer.

In summary, the disadvantages of year-round schooling identified by parents fall into three categories: 1) the disruption of family routine and activities, if children are in schools with different calendars; 2) the difficulty of planning family activities in the summer; and 3) problems finding childcare. Overall, however, the perceived benefits outweighed these disadvantages.

Teachers' Pre-implementation Concerns

In our research, more than 95% of teachers preferred a year-round calendar to the traditional calendar after having some experience with it. Other studies confirm that teachers who have experienced both year-round and traditional calendar schools are more positive about the relative merits of year-round schooling.²⁹ Prior to working in year-round schools, however, teachers expressed concerns about whether there would be an opportunity to complete university courses and other professional development activities. They also wondered whether there would be difficulties associated with scheduling family vacations. For the most part, these concerns have been found to be unwarranted.

Teachers who rely on summer employment to supplement their teaching income were concerned about the potentially negative effect of the year-round schedule on their income. Most subsequently indicated they found it easier to find employment throughout the year, with

some even preferring the resulting vacation schedule.³⁰

Regarding the effect of a year-round calendar on professional development, teachers we interviewed reported they were able to choose to attend professional development offerings either when they were on track or off track. Teachers enrolled in college or university courses found little difficulty with scheduling.

Teachers' Transitional Issues

When multi-tracking is implemented to accommodate more students in existing buildings, teachers and students may be required to pack up their materials, move out of their classrooms for the break, and move into a different classroom on their return. Some teachers express strong dislike for this aspect of year-round schooling, especially if a designated classroom has not been properly prepared according to an agreed-upon timeline or schedule. Others accommodate readily to the typical system of assigning teachers large cabinets on wheels in which to store their materials. Sometimes the accommodation is enhanced by agreements regarding sharing bulletin board displays and other classroom materials. Teachers also recognize that it is important to ensure that moving is orderly and efficient to prevent lost instructional time for track changes in multi-track schools.

Scheduling field trips, assemblies, and special events is also more complex in multi-track year-round schools. In some schools, assemblies are held twice, once to accommodate tracks A and C and a second time for students on tracks B and D. In other schools, teachers ensure a reasonable variety of activities for each track, and there is no effort to invite students to return from vacation to attend special events. Overall, access to school facilities and opportunities to participate in regular school activities are improved by most multi-track organizational arrangements. This is because when some students are off track, the rest experience increased access to facilities such as the gym, library, art rooms, and computers. Even though most teachers quickly express a liking for the year-round breaks, there is little doubt that the organization of year-round schooling requires teachers to think differently about many of the activities in which they traditionally engage.

Teachers' Post-implementation Responses

First-hand experience with year-round schooling seems to convince teachers of its benefits, both on a personal level and for their students. Personal advantages sometimes relate to higher levels of relaxation, reflection, motivation, and, occasionally, higher salaries.³¹

There is strong evidence that teacher attendance is better once a school moves to a year-round schedule. Teachers also report that having regular breaks rejuvenates them and leads to more discussion about teaching and learning when they come back on track.

Teachers conclude that students also benefit from the same advantages and are better prepared to engage in classroom learning activities. They see benefits for their students, such as higher student enjoyment and motivation.³² They also perceive that students forget less and need less review. Teachers suggest that more regular breaks give them the opportunity to be reflective practitioners and that children benefit in a similar way.

First-year teachers, especially, report that being able to plan for nine weeks and then regroup, decide what has and has not worked, and make necessary adjustments is of particular assistance to them. Moreover, teachers indicate that they tend to plan in three-, six-, or

Read the Alberta
Teachers' Association
position statement on
year-round schools at
[www.teachers.ab.ca/
policy/papers/paper19.
html](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/policy/papers/paper19.html)

nine-week units. Not only does this facilitate teaming, but teachers believe it helps keep them more focused on the learning objectives and material they need to cover.

Elementary teachers report that having planning time dispersed at intervals throughout the year, after they have become acquainted with a specific group of students, is considerably more productive than trying to complete planning during the summer. Secondary school teachers consistently state that when their school starts earlier than others in the fall, they are able to establish academic routines and have approximately one month of focused instruction before students are distracted by extracurricular activities such as football celebrations and pep rallies. While teachers believe that year-round school focuses students throughout the school year, they recognize that retaining focus can be problematic for tracks that continue later than most other schools.

Teachers on year-round schedules say that both their own and their students' motivation and enthusiasm are greater than their counterparts in traditional schools. In addition, they identify fewer difficulties with discipline and classroom management as well as lower stress and tension among students and staff.

Administrators' Attitudes

During interviews, administrators said they believe that participants in year-round schooling benefit from greater motivation, less stress, and more collaboration and interaction than those in traditional schools. Some reported that the number of student behaviors requiring disciplinary action dropped as much as 66%. Principals of year-round schools also recorded fewer incidences of school vandalism, perhaps because schools are vacant for shorter periods of time.

Many principals and district administrators said that teachers often line up to get a position in a year-round school. They noted that increased teacher satisfaction and improved teacher attendance might lead to decreases in substitute costs. Principals also maintained that there is more teacher interaction, and, consistent with teacher reports, they observed that teachers are more organized and plan their instructional units differently in year-round schools.

In many instances, extensive consultations and meetings between school and district personnel and community members preceded the introduction of year-round schooling. These extra efforts frequently result in increased support for, and commitment to, both the school and the new calendar.

Secondary principals tended to agree with the teachers about the strong academic focus achieved in the first month, when many distractions are postponed until the rest of the district begins classes.

We asked administrators in our study to rank order the three calendars — traditional, single-track, or multi-track — in terms of their benefits. None of the administrators ranked the traditional calendar first. Despite the recognition that year-round schooling presents particular administrative challenges with respect to workload and school organization, all were enthusiastic about the benefits to teachers and students.

Other researchers also have found that administrators with experience of traditional and year-round schedules prefer the latter, despite increases in administrative workload, particularly in multi-track schools.¹¹

Visit the Education World website at www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin137.shtml to read the school administrators article "Is Year-Round Schooling the Answer?"

Administrative Challenges

For the most part, challenges for administrators relate primarily to the organization of the school year in multi-track schools. These include determining bus routes, scheduling school space and special events, allocating teachers to tracks, and assigning students to classes.

Another challenge is that of administrator burnout, although one 1992 study found no difference in the level of burnout between principals in schools on year-round and traditional calendars on validated measures assessing personal exhaustion and sense of individual accomplishment.¹⁴ Where burnout does tend to occur, it appears related to the fact that many year-round principals accumulate (and subsequently lose) considerable amounts of unused vacation time. Recently some districts have taken measures to address this problem, including hiring retired principals to substitute for vacationing principals and changing the policies regarding the amount of vacation time that may be carried over from year to year.

Another challenge is internal school communication in multi-track schools. While some principals try to involve all staff members in meetings and decision making, others hold regular meetings and invite input from those who are off track. Most indicate that they learn how to make better use of e-mail, weekly memos, and color-coded day planners to ensure they communicate in a timely fashion with all teachers.

Principals need to ensure that as many programs as possible are available on all tracks and that parents and teachers feel the allocation of teachers has been fair and timely. Balance becomes particularly challenging when students are assigned to tracks and classes, a task that is handled differently from district to district.¹⁵ Sometimes uneven distribution of students across tracks can adversely affect both teacher morale and the potential for saving space. In some districts, principals do their best to accommodate parental choice. Parents whose children are assigned to their requested tracks may be pleased, but those whose children are not may feel disappointed and discriminated against. Accommodating parents' requests may also create socioeconomic, ethnic, or ability imbalances on certain tracks. However, administrators can use a variety of approaches to solve these problems, such as lotteries, asking parents to designate only "impossible" tracks, and tracking by neighborhood with boundaries carefully drawn to provide heterogeneity.

Summary

After a few years of experience, most stakeholders believe a year-round schedule improves working conditions and provides a better learning environment for students. Where implementers have not attended to social, political, or fiscal issues, parents and educators express particular concerns. In the next section, we briefly outline some of the contextual considerations that can hinder or facilitate the successful implementation of year-round schooling.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the following discussion, we highlight some issues that educators need to explore and discuss at both the district and school level as well as with the wider community.¹⁶ For the most part, these have not been extensively examined in the literature.

Political Issues

Education and educational change are essentially political endeavors. This suggests that careful attention needs to be given to consultation and representation as well as to coalition building and dissemination of information at every stage of the change initiative, from initial discussions and consideration through decisions regarding implementation. These forms of team building are also essential to ongoing support for the change initiative and for any subsequent assessment or evaluation.

In our study, districts that have not attended to political issues have experienced difficulties at some stage of the implementation process, occasionally leading to the termination of the year-round schedule. Sometimes districts have made promises about the benefits, such as a specific gain in test scores over a short period of time or specific fiscal savings. On other occasions, inadequate district support has left schools to fend for themselves. Sometimes district policies are inequitably administered, with schools in lower socioeconomic areas forced to implement a year-round schedule while schools in higher socioeconomic areas are exempted due to vocal parent lobbies. At other times, decision making is inequitable, with more powerful or vocal minority groups able to sway the majority. As others note, these are issues that need careful consideration, if a calendar change is to be successful.³⁷

School and Community Issues

With a well-developed and equitable consultation process, schools can gain a high level of support for the proposed innovation and simultaneously increase overall support for and involvement in the school.³⁸ Permitting the school community to have both input as well as choice in the ultimate decision is an essential component of effective school-community relations. This may include inviting students, parents, and educators to design a calendar that would work for a specific community. Where possible, it might also include the option of transfer to a school chosen to maintain a traditional schedule. If there are compelling reasons for refraining from implementing a year-round schedule, open, inclusive processes and full discussion will help to ensure that the final decisions do not result in schisms or irreparable damage.

Another way of thinking about community is to consider the sense of community in individual school buildings. Considerations related to sense of community within a single-track year-round school are similar to those of traditional calendar schools. Without some additional attention, however, multi-track year-round schedules may cause some difficulties. For example, dispersing students from a small neighborhood over several tracks may complicate car-pooling, child care, and after-school activities with friends. Assigning all ESL or special education classes to one track may serve to segregate specific groups of students. Likewise, granting parents' requests for tracks and teachers without regard to overall integration and balance may create enclaves within a school and obscure an overall sense of a schoolwide community. Finally, careful consideration of how to communicate with families whose children are off track as well as with teachers enjoying vacation periods is essential for the health of the whole school community.

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Fiscal Issues

One complex issue is the question of whether the introduction of year-round schooling will save money or cost money for individual schools or districts. To answer this question, a number of factors must be considered. Single-track year-round schooling is not introduced to save money, although it rarely adds significant additional costs to a budget. Its introduction as a means to improve the educational program is sometimes accompanied by parallel innovations, such as intersession. While intersession activities may cost money, it is not appropriate to consider them as an intrinsic cost of the change to a year-round calendar.

Multi-track year-round schooling, on the other hand, is generally implemented to alleviate overcrowding and to save money. It is important to note that the cost savings realized through this schedule accrue at the district level rather than at individual schools, where operating costs will probably increase due to an increase in the number of pupils in attendance. Moreover, it is important to recognize that cost savings and educational quality are not incompatible. We have found that, when carefully implemented, both the single-track and multi-track schedules may have intrinsic educational benefits, act as a catalyst for additional innovation, and permit intersession offerings.

Calculation of Costs and Benefits

In order to accurately assess the fiscal effect of year-round schooling, it is important to consider a number of issues. First, it is essential to differentiate between operating costs and capital costs and determine which costs would be incurred on a per pupil basis, whether or not students were in a school on a year-round schedule. Transitional costs, such as building renovations or installation of air conditioning, should be amortized over a number of years. Sometimes special incentives are offered to schools that change calendars; these should likely be considered separately. Some incidentals, such as potential savings that may accrue with improved teacher attendance, are difficult to calculate in advance but are part of the overall picture.

It is important to have good baseline data concerning per pupil costs of operating the same school on a traditional calendar. One way to assess the overall fiscal effect of a calendar change is to compare the prior year baseline costs with the per pupil costs of operating the school on a year-round schedule. A second approach is to compare the costs of operating a year-round school with a traditional calendar school with a similar population in the same year. A third way to assess the fiscal effect is to conduct a simulation comparing the costs of a year-round school with the predicted costs if it were a traditional school in the same year at the same time with the same personnel. Because teachers' salaries tend to increase incrementally, operating costs change due to inflation, and different student bodies bring differing needs requiring varying interventions, it is important not to oversimplify cost estimates. All three methods are more fully examined in the literature.³⁹

An accurate cost accounting of a change to year-round schooling necessarily includes both operational and capital calculations. Accommodating additional children in a building will almost automatically increase the costs to that school while offering savings on a per-pupil basis at the district level. Furthermore, the most significant cost benefits are realized through avoided capital costs that accrue when a district is able to house more children in existing buildings rather than build new ones. Therefore, the additional costs of operating existing buildings should be considered against the avoided costs of fully staffing and operating new buildings.

CONCLUSION

While year-round school primarily involves modifications to a school calendar, it has the potential to act as a catalyst for reculturing that may lead to improved learning for all students. Moreover, when capital cost savings are considered, benefits may be realized at no additional long-term cost to a district. Overall quality of education will be improved when cost savings in one area are used to offset increased costs and to support increased needs in other areas. For example, a year-round school may require additional administrative time and secretarial support. Additionally, savings may be used to support intersession opportunities for the remediation and enrichment of student learning. Where cost savings are not returned to the educational program, however, sometimes year-round schooling is implemented at considerable personal cost to administrators and yields few educational benefits.

Where it is carefully planned and introduced with consultation and collaboration; all stakeholder groups stand to benefit from year-round schooling. Moreover, where it is creatively implemented with attention to community needs and particular emphasis on both political and educational issues, it promises educational advantages for all students. In today's climate of fiscal and educational accountability, it may be desirable to examine year-round schooling as an innovation whose time has finally come.

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APPENDIX A: COMMON YEAR-ROUND SCHEDULES

The following three adaptations of a single-track calendar are usually introduced to provide additional educational opportunities for students.

Single-track: The whole school adopts a calendar in which some summer vacation time is redistributed as regular breaks throughout the school year. Sometimes a 45-15 or 60-20 calendar is adopted, with intersession occurring during the breaks.

Dual-track: Some of the classes and teachers remain on the traditional school year calendar, while others in the same school adopt a modified school year, such as the 45-15. This offers flexibility of scheduling and accommodates a variety of preferences.

Secondary-school single-track quarter system: This system facilitates flexibility in course completion. Students may attend an additional quarter during the summer with voluntary attendance or during intersession breaks between quarters.

Multi-track schedules often are introduced to increase the number of students that can be accommodated in a building. The following are some of the most common plans.

Four-Track Schedules

45-15: Students attend school for 45 days, or nine weeks, followed by 15 days, or three weeks, of vacation. Each group of students is assigned to a track that rotates in an overlapping configuration, so at any given time 75% of students are in school and 25% are on vacation. This arrangement provides the potential for 33% more students to be accommodated in the building.

60-20: Students are assigned to four tracks, each of which meets for 60 days, or 12 weeks, followed by 20 days, or four weeks, of vacation. As in the previous schedule, at any given time 75% of the students are in school, and 25% are on vacation.

90-30: Students are in school for 90 days, with three vacation periods of 30 days each. This four-track schedule also increases a school's capacity by 33%.

Five-track Schedules

60-15: This calendar allows five groups of students to rotate on overlapping schedules of 60 days in school followed by 15 days off. It permits a three-week common vacation for all students and staff, while enabling a school to accommodate 25% more students than the traditional calendar.

Quinmester: Another five-track calendar divides the year into five nine-week blocks, with students attending four of the five terms (quins). It also permits an increased capacity of 25% but does not allow a common summer vacation.

Other Schedules

Variations are innumerable and include such combinations as the 15-5, 30-5, 45-10, 55-18, 60-10, and 65-20. Some more commonly implemented calendars include the following:

Concept Six: This is a three-track calendar divided into six terms of approximately 41 days each. On this schedule, students attend school fewer days than on a traditional calendar, but each day is lengthened to compensate. Students are divided into three groups, and each group attends four terms on a rotating basis. Only two tracks are in school at any one time. This permits an increase in school capacity of 50%.

Concept Eight: The curriculum is placed into eight, six-week blocks of time, with students choosing six of the eight, thereby having two, six-week vacation periods. This permits a 33% increase in capacity.

Orchard Plan: This is most commonly a variation of the five-track 60-15 schedule. Rather than rotate groups of students and their teachers, students within each class are divided into five groups or tracks. Only four tracks or 80% of the assigned students are in class at any one time. Thus, the teacher receives an extended-year contract (approximately 225 days), keeps his or her own classroom, and deals flexibly with students moving in and out of the classroom every 15 days. This also permits an increased capacity of 25%.

Other flexible or personalized schedules: There are a number of flexible or individualized schedules suited to any alternative or magnet school in which students may often progress at their own pace. Permitting students to design their own schedules of 180 days in school offers variable increases in capacity.

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